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SELLING THE BOSNIAN MYTH TO AMERICA: BUYER BEWARE

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DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A

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Foreign Military Studies Office
Ft. Leavenworth, Ks. 66027-5000
DSN: 552-5940/4333
October, 1995

19960311 031

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SELLING THE BOSNIAN MYTH TO AMERICA: BUYER BEWARE

"One man who minds his own business is more valuable to the world than 10,000 cocksure moralists."

H. L. Mencken

"The creation of a Serbian Republic within Bosnia is a victory for racist fanatics." (Anthony Lewis) "A 'political solution' in the Balkans is Orwellian diplo-speak for yielding land to Serbia that it seized by indiscriminate violence." (Albert Wohlstetter) "We should arm the victims of aggression." (William Safire)¹ This type of advocacy rhetoric regarding the Bosnian Muslim government in Sarajevo finally grew sufficiently deafening to dupe NATO into prosecuting the civil war against the Bosnian Serbs. These words stirred souls and ignited passions but frequently bore little resemblance to reality. In fact, America has not been so pathetically deceived since Robert McNamara helped to micromanage and escalate the Vietnam War while secretly lacking the intestinal fortitude to state his personal convictions of self-doubt about the enterprise to the President and nation.²

Popular perceptions pertaining to the Bosnian Muslim government (Bosniacs as they prefer to be called) have been forged by a prolific propaganda machine. A strange combination of three major spin doctors, including public relations (PR) firms in the employ of the Bosniacs, media pundits, and sympathetic elements of the U.S. State Department, have managed to manipulate illusions to further Muslim goals. Differing styles, approaches, and emphases make it difficult to discern collusion among these groups, but a degree of overlap does become apparent when evaluating their activities. For example, the combined emotive power of their efforts enabled them to leverage the debate in Congress where many experts (who should surely know better) supported lifting the arms embargo to help these "innocent Muslim victims" level the playing field against the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA).

Heated debates over the embargo issue transcended liberal versus conservative and hawk versus dove labels as the Bosniac lobby attempted to convince legislators that they risked moral and political suicide if they voted against supplying the Muslim army with guns. Recent combat developments demonstrate that the Bosniac government receives all the small arms it requires; and

¹ Respectively: Anthony Lewis, *New York Times*, Sept 11, 1995, p.15; Albert Wohlstetter, *Wall Street Journal*, Sept 5, 1995, p.14; William Safire, *New York Times*, Sept 21, 1995, p.23

² See Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect*. New York: Random House Publishers, 1995.

opinion polls reveal that most Americans care little about Bosnia and adamantly oppose deploying U.S. troops to the area other than to facilitate a UN withdrawal.³ Naturally, Bosniac supporters attempt to denigrate and dismiss these arguments intellectually while virulently attacking their proponents as harboring "pro-Serb" or even "Nazi" sympathies. Their Holocaust comparisons evoke powerful feelings and images, but in this case exist only in the fertile imaginations of media sound bite writers.

As NATO threatens to further employ its air forces in support of achieving Muslim military goals and the U.S. teeters on the precipice of embroiling itself in another Vietnam and Somalia-type quagmire, it is time to examine some of the myths being perpetuated about this conflict. These images can then be juxtaposed with the reality on the ground. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to scrutinize the often distorted truth of this Balkan struggle and highlight the sophisticated misinformation and disinformation being foisted upon the American public by misguided "moralists" and unprofessional elements of the media; second, to explain how the U.S. arrived at the dangerous position in which it now finds itself.

Exposing the popular fallacies regarding this conflict will also demonstrate why the U.S. remains consistently out of step with its traditional allies on Bosnian issues. The Europeans are certainly not less sensitive to the Bosnian government because it is comprised primarily of Muslims as some commentators slyly imply. Rather, they evaluate the situation from different information and a more realistic historical perspective. They retain the advantages of more in-depth, professional, and probing journalism and better reporting from their embassies. Furthermore, they pay less attention to the constant propaganda emanating from the Bosniacs and their agents - the PR firms. Hopefully, this discussion will also assist readers in anticipating the future propaganda themes which Muslim sympathists and apologists will employ to prod America into further engaging itself in this civil war.

BOSNIAN MUSLIM GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA

A brief examination of the role played by the PR companies which support the Bosnian Muslim disinformation campaign must necessarily precede any discussion of Bosniac propaganda. Their joint efforts have become inextricably interwoven, and it is virtually impossible to determine the lines where specific responsibilities begin and end. The wealthy Persian Gulf countries who pay the bills for these services have chosen formidable agents of influence to promote the Bosnian Muslim agenda in the West.

³ See, for example, the USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll published in *USA Today*, June 8, 1995.

In a well-researched and insightful article soon to be published in *European Security*, Professor C.G. Jacobsen of Carleton University in Canada delineates the sins of Hill & Knowlton and Ruder Finn - two of the primary Wall Street PR firms involved in this elaborate charade.⁴ The former managed the highly successful Kuwaiti public relations offensive prior to Desert Storm. Its achievements included convincing the American public of the perverse fabrication that Iraqi troops had ejected Kuwaiti babies from incubators. Executives from the latter have proudly boasted of their success in co-opting significant segments of the American Jewish community to the Bosnian Muslim cause despite the intolerance for Judaism among the ruling Muslim clique in Bosnia.⁵

The successful efforts of these firms resulted in the portrayal of unilateral Serbian atrocities in such a way that future moral judgements were seriously corrupted. Ailing Serbs in Muslim prison camps were described as Muslims in Serb camps; Bosniac ethnic cleansing was ignored; statistics on mixed marriages were inflated to manipulate an image of pre-war peaceful coexistence; aid from Serbia proper was inflated or invented to force the application of trade sanctions and embargoes; BSA military advantages were falsely compared to supposed Muslim shortages; Bosniac military offensives (more frequent than BSA attacks) went deliberately unreported; mass rape charges were willfully manufactured and printed by the media; and the list continues with more odious examples which the public accepted without challenge.⁶

Questions of ethics (and possibly legality) aside, the PR companies have undeniably mounted an enormously successful propaganda campaign against the U.S. The public views Serbs as evil incarnate, and the cornucopia of disinformation that has been propagated about the Bosnian civil war would require volumes to adequately address. Consequently, only a representative sampling of the most insidious and pernicious fictions follows below.

Some of the prevailing myths concerning the Bosnian Muslim government which impartial observers should unhesitatingly question include: its effusive and whining protestations of being

⁴ C.G. Jacobsen, "Yugoslavia's Successor Wars Reconsidered," *European Security*, (forthcoming edition) Winter, 1996.

⁵ See, for example, Alexander Cockburn writing in *The Nation*, May 9, 1994, p.621.

⁶ Jacobsen and Cockburn. Professor Jacobsen uses a line which perfectly places into perspective the false notion of an ethno-idyllic pre-war Bosnia. Describing the foibles of a previous *New York Times* Bosnian correspondent, he noted, "(He) talked of Bosnia's 1000 years of inter-ethnic and religious peace, betraying an historical ignorance so profound as to make flat earth believers look omniscient."

the innocent victim; its claims of growing military competence which only requires modern heavy weapons to even the balance; rightful ownership of contested territory; and most importantly, its duplicitous proclaimed goal to establish a liberal western-style democracy for all ethnicities and religions.

Innocent Victims

The "innocent victim" ploy tugs on the world's heartstrings the most effectively. Gut-wrenching pictures of guiltless dead children who moments before being gunned down by cowardly snipers were playing in safe vacant lots, noncombatants (women and elders) shot for merely crossing the street, people weaving between anti-sniper shields, sand bags, and protective UN vehicles merely to buy a loaf of bread. And, of course, most dastardly of all, the two mortar attacks in Sarajevo's Markale Market Square on February 5, 1994 and August 28, 1995. These attacks snuffed the lives of 68 and 37 unsuspecting people, respectively, and served as the catalyst for NATO retribution from the air in both cases. However, who must shoulder the responsibility for the mean streets of Sarajevo? Both the mortar attacks and the sniping incidents require closer examination.

In an investigative report published in the October 2, 1995 edition of *The Nation*, David Binder penned a most fascinating and thorough summary of the inconsistencies associated with these two mortar attacks. While stating that the UN "sticks by the conclusions of its inquiry" and blames the Serbs - at least in the second incident - the author nevertheless persuasively enumerated the factors which indicated that the BSA was not responsible.

Binder also notes support for his arguments from some American and Canadian specialists as well as (Russian) Colonel Andrei Demurenko, the Chief of Staff of the Sector Sarajevo peacekeeping unit. (According to an article in *The Sunday Times* (London), British and French crater analysis teams supported these same conclusions but were overruled by the UN.) No need exists to rehash all of his convincing arguments here, but primarily, they include suspicions about the firing distance, "anomalies with the (mortar) fuse," fields of observation, and trajectory difficulties.⁷

⁷ David Binder, *The Nation*, Oct 2, 1995, p.336. Mr. Binder's article concentrates primarily on the second mortar attack, but the technical factors which he notes apply equally to the first incident. Additionally, some very tough questions remain unanswered from the more devastating Feb 1994 episode. These include: Why were people herded into the area minutes before the attack?; How could a government which consistently justifies its inability to abide by short ceasefires on inadequate communications miraculously notify the press and simultaneously dispatch ambulances to the scene within minutes?; and Why did the tail fin of the mortar shell inexplicably disappear shortly after the attack? (Prior to capturing some BSA

If the facts force us to confront the issue that the Muslims may have conducted these operations to obtain additional sympathy and publicity for their cause, those who know Sarajevo intimately must ask the next logical question. Given the proximity of the Markale Market Square to the Presidency (Bosniac White House), who granted permission to launch these brutal and insane attacks? Surely, it almost had to have been President Alija Izetbegovic or Vice President Ejup Ganic. Both incidents deserve a thorough investigation by the International War Crimes Tribunal.

The constant sniping incidents deserve equal scrutiny. Objective observers in Sarajevo frequently describe the abhorrent activity of snipers from both sides, but suspicions persist that the Muslims have murdered their own people when the potential existed for instant newsworthiness. Photographers have done nothing to abate this horror by their vulture-like waiting at areas vulnerable to sniping. In fact, the Bosnian government encourages this wrongheaded activity in the belief that such publicity aids its cause. Bosniac spokesmen denounce such accusations as patently false and claim that they amount only to UN excuses for its own indifferent behavior.

Anti-sniping activities conducted by the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Sarajevo, in fact, constitute quite impressive operations. Teams which perform this duty receive exceptional training from their armies and possess state-of-the-art optical aids and equipment. Employing these capabilities, the French recently decided to test over three years' worth of UN hunches pertaining to this issue. Their investigation "definitively" (their words) established the validity of UN suppositions that "some gunfire came from (Bosniac) Government soldiers deliberately shooting at their own civilians."⁸

The sniping incidents also demonstrate the effectiveness of internal Bosniac propaganda. Sarajevo citizens have been so firmly (and falsely) indoctrinated by their government that UNPROFOR should intervene and fight this war for them that on occasion they have refused to help their own victims shot in the

stocks during subsequent fighting, the Bosniac government was forced to handmake its mortar and artillery shells. This process meant that every tail fin was distinctive and would have provided conclusive evidence. Interestingly enough, when the initial photos of the second attack were broadcast, someone made certain that a mortar tail fin was prominently displayed in the panoramic shot.) Also see Hugh McManners, *The Sunday Times* (London), Oct 1, 1995.

⁸ See the excellent article on this matter by Mike O'Connor in the *New York Times*, Aug 1, 1995, p.A-5. In most cases, assessing guilt for specific sniping incidents remains problematic. The French investigation, however, set a well-laid trap for the Bosniacs.

street.⁹ Retired Canadian General Lewis Mackenzie, the first UN commander in Sarajevo, eloquently described this phenomenon in a passage of his book:

Sergeant Forest, supported by Captain Belisle, had risked his life rescuing two Muslim women who had been shot by snipers on the main road through Sarajevo. In spite of this selfless act of bravery, we (UNPROFOR) were condemned for not going back under fire to recover other victims, who had been confirmed dead by Sergeant Forest. All of this happened with the TDF (Bosniac Army) close by; yet the onlookers opted to condemn UNPROFOR officers who had just saved two lives.¹⁰

This type of peculiar behavior continues. Many soldiers from all countries who have served in Sarajevo, especially those who have performed anti-sniper missions, can relate similar experiences.

Military Competence

Another chimera advertised by the Bosniac government concerns its assertions of military competence. The perception which it attempts to present to the world portrays a well-officered professional army which only lacks modern heavy weaponry to attain success on the battlefield. While the Commander-in-Chief, General Rasim Delic, and his subordinate commanders brashly speak of taking the fight to the Serbs, most of their troops' willingness to fight centers only on their home turf. This issue can best be termed *territoriality* and constitutes a major Bosniac military weakness.

The bulk of the Muslim army is derived from the old territorial defense units which were organized into "opstina" (county) brigades. Most of these units remain in the area of their original opstina and are manned by former reservists and conscript soldiers drawn from it. Their ties to the land make these troops reluctant to move from the area. Accordingly, the Muslims must rely on several mobile brigades which they have recruited from refugees who have lost their territory and now have a stronger incentive for fighting. At least one brigade is comprised of Muslims expelled from Croatia. Another unit, the

⁹ UNPROFOR's mandate specifically requires "impartiality." Its mission can be summarized as follows: to establish conditions favorable to a cessation of hostilities and provide military assistance to international agencies involved in humanitarian efforts. Despite Izetbegovic's constant ranting that "UNPROFOR has no right to be neutral," the UN would not approve a mission which clearly took sides. Of course, Bosniac propagandists have successfully exploited the unfortunate choice of names (i.e. protection force) to push their agenda to both foreign and domestic audiences.

¹⁰ Lewis MacKenzie, *Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo*, Harper-Collins, Toronto, 1994, p.440.

7th Muslim Brigade, has tended to attract Islamic extremists and has a reputation for aggressive behavior and an offensive spirit. The Bosniacs use these mobile brigades for major operations, but without Croat forces tying down BSA formations elsewhere, these units remain incapable of sustained success against their foes.

The Bosniacs do possess one noteworthy military advantage: their infantry. Their infantry constitutes the strongest part of their army and numbers nearly 140,000, giving them a 2:1 advantage in manpower over the BSA. While it is organized into corps and brigades, it generally appears capable of only limited battalion size operations. The Bosniac infantry has been bloodied from being forced to leave its trenches to seize terrain and has become more effective than its BSA equivalent which cannot afford substantial casualties. Nevertheless, Bosnian Muslim assertions that this advantage can offer them military success if they only obtain appropriate weaponry reflect an outlandish belief in their own propaganda.¹¹

Bosniac claims of proficient military leadership, however, rank among their most delusional fantasies. Muslim officers attain their rank not by competence and experience but rather through political and religious ties.¹² Their summer 1994 attempts to capture Route Duck, a major supply route traversing through the Ozren Mountains, remain instructive of their deficiencies.

¹¹ See John E. Sray, "The Bosnian Warring Factions: A Brief Synopsis," *Soldier-Statesman*, Fall/Winter 1994, p.7-10 for a more complete military summary of the three primary Bosnian factions.

¹² Some of these officers also maintain significant connections with organized crime. The most striking example was Naser Oric, the Bosniac Commander of the Srebrenica "safe haven" prior to its fall. Oric is expected to be indicted by the International War Crimes Tribunal for killing hundreds of Serb civilians. (See Reuters 17:54 11-13-95) However, he also exploited the Muslim civilians in the enclave who worked for the UN by extorting as much as eighty percent of their income for his personal gain. He also forced them to buy their allotted quota of cigarettes in the UN-subsidized store established for the Dutch troops guarding the area. Oric then confiscated these and sold them on the black market. He was also a skillful propagandist. When the Muslim government once let it slip that they might consider trading Srebrenica for land around Sarajevo, Oric quickly gave a rousing speech reminiscent of some of history's best known freedom fighters about how he would not surrender his land. Of course, Oric cared little for the enclave or its people. For him, the war amounted to a simple matter of self-aggrandizement. Equally disreputable characters have attained leadership positions in Serbian ranks. Zeljko Raznjatovic, better known as Arkan, has been noted for his criminal connections and is reportedly responsible for a plethora of war crimes.

On the basis of General Delic's continued boasting, the Muslim army attempted to conduct a two-pronged offensive on the area with their II and III Corps advancing from opposite directions. (The fact that they had never successfully coordinated anything larger than a battalion attack prior to this operation apparently had no effect on their planning.) The first battle ended in total disaster and the Bosniacs signed a cessation of hostilities agreement which required them to withdraw their forces from the Ozren salient. Using an unrelated incident in Sarajevo as a pretext for breaking this accord, they again renewed their attack with the element of surprise now decisively in their favor.

Caught by a disingenuous plan, the BSA initially lost considerable ground and was forced to evacuate over 5,000 civilians. Within two weeks, however, the Muslim supply and personnel replacement system collapsed and their offensive disintegrated. The problem revolved not only around insufficient logistic planning but incompetent terrain and battle analysis.

The Bosniacs never conducted proper reconnaissance and did not attempt to secure the necessary key terrain that dominated their attack routes. Furthermore, they consistently failed to exploit tactical successes and quickly lost the momentum. They made no apparent effort to maintain contact with BSA retreating units and suffered unnecessary casualties by having to constantly find the enemy and redefine the battle area. A classic example occurred to the southeast of the Blizna Mountain. The BSA had launched a limited counterattack to hold ground only long enough to mine it. When they withdrew, the Bosniacs assaulted through the area to reclaim it and subsequently found themselves trapped in a minefield under heavy artillery fire. Such are the exaggerated claims of military expertise.¹³

¹³ The press often turns a blind eye to other elements of Bosniac military propaganda. When Delic bragged that he would "break the siege of Sarajevo" and then promptly lost not only this battle but the two eastern enclaves of Zepa and Srebrenica, the media bemoaned the UN failure to protect the "safe areas." The UN never possessed the military capability to defend these enclaves on the ground and NATO air power in these instances was a bluff. Accordingly, the UN never required the Bosnian Muslim army to withdraw from them. The Bosniacs understood that they were responsible for their own defense and consistently launched attacks on the BSA from these positions. When the BSA retaliated and took the enclaves, propagandists convinced the world that the UN could not accomplish its mission. Additionally, commentators do not seem to realize that the capture of these areas was never militarily necessary. The BSA could have simply starved them out whenever they wanted. Instead, the BSA sent a message of military retribution for Delic's attacks into Serb-held suburbs around Sarajevo. In a similar media oversight, the Bosniacs have long maintained a mortar in a garage adjacent to Kosevo Hospital. They occasionally fire this weapon into Serb gun positions hoping to draw counterbattery fire which would hit the hospital and

Rightful Ownership of Territory

Another persistent element of the propaganda onslaught involves legitimate ownership of land. The BSA could never have "overrun, seized, or captured" 70 percent of the country as Bosniac government verbal gimmicks state. While they controlled 70 percent of the territory during much of this conflict, the BSA certainly did not possess the military manpower to overrun, seize, or capture it. The media and PR firms employ these inflammatory words only to obfuscate the pre-war situation. Due to their agrarian way of life, the Serbs formed a plurality in 64 percent of the territory at the beginning of the war while the more urbane Muslim business-oriented people resided in the cities.¹⁴

Simple historical precedent determined this situation. When the Ottoman Empire conquered the area, some Serbs and a small number of Croats converted to Islam. (The most rabid Serb and Croat nationalists consider Bosnian Muslims illegitimate mongrels.) Their reasons for this action were more economic than religious since they sought access to better jobs from their Turkish overlords. These people became the ancestors of today's Bosnian Muslims and congregated in the cities where employment opportunities tended to hold more potential. Over the course of time, they failed to acquire the more significant land holdings of their ex-kin.

The modern-day question, though, concerns legitimacy. Does Bosnia as a sovereign state have a right to control its territory? Undeniably. Nonetheless, it must meet the minimum *de facto* criteria for sovereignty, and it apparently has failed to do so. Most importantly, it remains incapable of defending its own territory against Bosnian Serbs who choose to exercise their legitimate right of secession in the same manner as Bosnia seceded from Yugoslavia. Simply stated, the situation amounts to a civil war within a civil war.

Some Muslim apologists have attempted to advance the preposterous argument that this conflict should not be considered an internal affair since Bosnia has become a member of the UN. Rather, they wish to view it as a Serbian proper war of aggression. While President Milosevic of Serbia certainly aggravated the conflict with his nationalistic bombast, evidence for Serbian involvement has been fabricated or exaggerated.¹⁵ In terms of this UN membership logic, Americans might ask where

generate substantial publicity. This fact is well-known around the city but conveniently not mentioned in press dispatches.

¹⁴ See, for example, the "Ethnic Majorities" maps in *The Former Yugoslavia: A Map Folio*, Central Intelligence Agency, CPAS 93-10003, April 1993, p.3

¹⁵ See, for example, Jacobsen and MacKenzie.

our country would be today if the UN had been around in 1776 or 1861. Much to the UN's credit, it realizes that it cannot impose a solution to the Bosnian civil war - but this situation remains unacceptable to the Muslims who do not yet understand the concept that "freedom is not free" and demand protection from others while promulgating their status as innocent victims and practicing their own territorial aggression.

Liberal Western-Style Democracy

The most dubious of all Bosniac claims pertains to the self-serving commercial that the government hopes to eventually establish a multiethnic liberal democratic society. Such ideals may appeal to a few members of Bosnia's ruling circle as well as to its generally secular populace, but President Izetbegovic and his cabal appear to harbor much different private intentions and goals. Poignant pleas for Western help to the contrary, his interviews for *Oslobodjenje*, the Sarajevo daily newspaper, constantly remind his audience that their best friends are "other Islamic countries." Additionally, his cocky (albeit infrequent) propensity to let down his guard has resulted in some inadvertently revealing interviews for Westerners.

Izetbegovic had been imprisoned twice for Islamic activity under Tito's communist regime. With the now almost universal hatred of Tito and his followers, the President has astutely exploited these events to his favor. His noble act of protest on behalf of religious freedom, however, does not necessarily make him a proponent for freedom of religion in his country. He has yet to renounce his "Islamic Declaration," written in 1970, which states: "There can be neither peace nor coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions."¹⁶

In some areas controlled by Muslims, Croat Catholics complain that they are not permitted to attend mass. Orthodox Serbs and Jews fare no better. The Muslims loudly complain to the press that only mosques are damaged during fighting, but a simple drive through the Bosnian hinterland reveals the spurious nature of this assertion. More prominently, (even for the media to notice) a Serbian Orthodox church in Sarajevo shows obvious signs of damage from mortars and small arms fire that could only have come from the Bosniacs.¹⁷

The most visible destruction of religious landmarks has occurred in the historic Jewish cemetery in Sarajevo where some of the graves date back to the time of Columbus. Muslims have not been solely responsible for the damage here, but they perpetuate it and have become the worst offenders. A portion of

¹⁶ Quote taken from Cockburn's article.

¹⁷ This structure stands near the Miljacka River just two blocks from the sports complex where Katarina Witt won her olympic gold medal in 1984.

the confrontation line between the BSA and the Muslim army bisects this site and low-level fighting occurs almost daily. Unique marbled gravestones and crypts have been desecrated by Bosniac troops digging under and around them to establish better vantage points for firing positions. This area is completely ignored by the media except when CNN decides to add a touch of drama and feature one of their correspondents near the sight of some current firing. In this case, the cemetery usually provides an adequate backdrop.

Izetbegovic's true ambitions for Bosnia occasionally appear in his words. When an interviewer pressed him on some of Islam's strictures such as female clothing, he answered, "The west says that women in the west are free, and that women are not free in Islam. But the west makes women into advertisements, into objects. Islam respects women."¹⁸ Most Bosnian women would certainly not appreciate the meaning behind these sentiments, but Islamic dress becomes more common as more women begin to identify culturally with their past. In some areas, Mujahedin actually pay females to dress according to Islamic tradition and harass (sometimes with gun fire) those who do not.

In response to a question concerning his desire to establish Shari'a (Islamic law) in Bosnia, Izetbegovic firmly answered, "No," and then added, "But if you think about it, what is wrong with the Shari'a? Is it less humane to cut off a man's hand than to take several years from his life in prison? You cut off the hand, it is done. I don't know. I am just thinking out loud."¹⁹ His thoughts should not impart a reassuring feeling to the humanitarians among us.

Bosniac ties to radical Islam should not be lightly dismissed. The Bosnian government enjoys closer cooperation with Iran than it would readily admit and takes great pains to preclude curiosity seekers (including UNPROFOR) from observing their partner's embassy in Sarajevo. At least through 1994, Bosnian police stood watch and sealed the road which led to the temporary location where Iranian diplomats were housed. In a twist of fate indicative of Sarajevo's ever-changing fortunes,

¹⁸ Brian Hall, *The Impossible Country: A Journey Through the Last Days of Yugoslavia*, David R. Godine, Boston, p.162.

¹⁹ Ibid. The government's efforts to ensure religious diversity remain suspect in other ways. UNPROFOR soldiers encountered no resistance when visiting sick children and distributing candy and small toys to them in Kosevo Hospital. When attempts were made to do the same for the orphanage, excuses became rampant as to why such visits should be postponed. Finally, one frustrated Bosnian interpreter admitted that the government denied permission because it feared some of these children may be adopted and converted to another faith. However, when the government determines that publicity is lacking, it will permit TV cameras into the orphanage for "human interest" stories.

the Iranians chose a site only three blocks to the east from the very spot where Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated. A minaret stands guard at the base of the street diagonal to the city's old repository where hundreds of years of historical records have been tragically reduced to ashes. An old Turkish fort overlooks the Iranians from an adjacent hill to the southeast.

Approximately 4000 Mujahedin, supported by Iranian special operations forces, have been continually intensifying their activities in central Bosnia for more than two years. Detachments of Mujahedin have assisted in training selected Bosniac army elements and began to spearhead many tactical-level attacks against the BSA during the summer of 1994. The potential for this organization to escalate its activities remains high and could threaten regional stability despite any future agreements.²⁰

Funding for the Mujahedin has been provided by Iran and various other Islamic states with an interest in expanding extremism into Europe. International radical groups, such as Hizbollah, have also been included on the suspected list of sponsors. Bosnian government sources only grudgingly acknowledge the presence of the Mujahedin but publicly intimate that they have accepted their presence as a "necessary evil" to maintain the flow of aid from international Islamic contributors. This "aid" has been distributed in forms ranging from hard currency to clandestine arms shipments. As time progresses, these professional "holy warriors" will likely divert their attention to politicizing the Muslim population and attempting to establish an Islamic republic obedient to fundamentalist doctrine.²¹

²⁰ See Dr. Graham H. Turbiville Jr., LTC John E. Sray, and Major Thomas E. Sidwell, "Foreign SOF" (Special Operations Forces), *Special Warfare*, July 1995, p.48-49. The Bosniacs sometimes attempt to use the Mujahedin as an example of the help they can receive from their fellow Muslim countries if UNPROFOR decides to withdraw. Such musings lack credibility. Middle Eastern armies are trained for combat in the desert and would not fare well in a cold mountainous climate. The Malays demonstrated their lack of discipline during an incident in which they were required to reinforce the Canadians in the Croat enclave around Kiseljak. When they were deployed to this location, they desecrated a cross and raped a 16-year old girl within 24 hours of their arrival. They were saved only by the quick action of the Canadian commander who ordered them off line before the Croats could get to them. Pakistani "success" in Somalia led to the U.S. necessity to commit troops; and the Bangladeshis will be discussed below. The Turks perform admirably, but they remain in Bosnia to monitor the Iranians as much as to confirm their support for their Muslim co-religionists. Turkey's broader national interests would argue against a strong presence in Bosnia if the remainder of NATO disapproved.

²¹ Ibid.

MEDIA BIASES AND SENTIMENTS

Many journalists, who undeniably labor under dangerous and miserable conditions, deserve numerous accolades for the reporting functions they perform in Bosnia.²² Far too many others maintain no particular commitment to the truth and have permitted themselves to become pawns of the propaganda structure. (Unfortunately, due to the subject matter of this paper, these latter individuals constitute the focus group described in the remainder of this section.)

These correspondents frequently limit their time in Bosnia to short stays and fail to gain an appreciation for the true nuances at play in this war. Watching and reading their reports too often conveys the impression that they feel the pressure of competition for a voyeuristic audience against their pampered tabloid-like peers (such as those who covered the O.J. Simpson trial) and try to react accordingly. This segment of the media views its job security as dependent upon obtaining thirty seconds of good video footage accompanied with appropriate sound bites from Muslim officials or their populace.

Many journalists in this vein value their protection and tend to report from a distance. At times, they even appear to be victims of a bizarre variation of the infamous "Stockholm Syndrome" as they remain safely within Bosniac army lines and depend on the government for their information as well as their safety.²³ The Bosniac government happily exploits them and complies with their requests to film and report from Muslim vantage points with the mutual philosophy between them amounting to the principle that the more suffering and destruction the better the venue.

The result, obviously, becomes tawdry reporting that panders to the Bosniac point of view and results in misleading news reports. Serb incompetence in dealing with the media only

²² Based on this author's experience in Bosnia, we have seen consistently incisive and on-target commentary from A.M. Rosenthal of the *New York Times*. For the least realistic analysis, read the unattributed editorials in the *Wall Street Journal* - some of which appear to originate directly from the fax machines of the PR firms - as well as Anthony Lewis in the *New York Times*. Curiously, Mr. Lewis dismissed the efficacy of air power in the desert prior to the Gulf War. Now, he advocates it as a panacea in mountainous terrain for all of Bosnia's ills.

²³ The "Stockholm Syndrome" refers to the emotions experienced by hostages who fear for their own safety and begin to empathize and sometimes completely espouse the convictions of their captors. Obviously, these journalists are not being held captive, but their dependence on the Bosniac government for protection and, in some cases, spoon-fed wire service reports, results in the same attitude.

intensifies this unbalanced flow of information. (When they do permit journalists into their territory, BSA representatives usually accompany them. The media derisively refer to their escorts as "minders," but, in fact, such practices are standard with most military organizations to include the Bosnian Muslim Army.)²⁴

Much of the media has become so engrossed in platitudes and their own self-fulfilling prophecies that Bosnian propaganda is now widely accepted as an article of faith, and journalists have abrogated their responsibility to verify their information. Ironically, if the public decides to confer "superstar" status on one of these personalities, the problem of credibility often intensifies. When several segments of the media decided to support the absurd notion that British General Michael Rose, the former Commander of the UN forces in Bosnia, was pro-Serb, they engaged in some extremely trashy journalism.²⁵ (Absurdly, but not inconsequentially from a propaganda point of view, the U.S. ambassador also endorsed this fiction. He pointedly demonstrated his displeasure by boycotting the farewell party for General Rose at the end of his tour.) Two examples should suffice to make this point.

During a series of broadcasts in April - May 1994, the media, led primarily by Christiane Amanpour and some of her CNN colleagues, lambasted General Rose for failing to prevent Serbian aggression during the battle for Gorazde. They unabashedly emphasized that even though a British soldier serving as a Joint Commission Observer (JCO) had been killed by the Serbs during this battle and a British Sea Harrier shot down, Rose permitted the BSA to pound the city with artillery and only allowed NATO

²⁴ As an example of this inherent press bias, Radovan Karadzic, President of the self-styled Bosnian Serb Republic, was named one of the top ten enemies of the press by the Committee to Protect Journalists. According to this organization, at least thirty reporters have been killed since 1992. While no known justification exists to challenge these numbers, murder in Bosnia will continue to remain a murky subject, at best, for the near future. The organization cited no evidence to single out the Serbs in these cases. These unfortunate deaths could probably be blamed on any of the warring factions.

²⁵ With the collusion of the media, Bosniac propagandists attempted to vilify and tarnish the hard-won reputations of every UNPROFOR commander in Sarajevo. They falsely accused General MacKenzie of having a Serbian girlfriend (he recounts this episode in his book); General Briquemont of Belgium was harangued for pacifism; and they attempted to paint General Rose as pro-Serb. If the UN ever decides to release the many letters between General Rose's Headquarters and the Bosnian Serbs, this asinine accusation will abruptly cease.

air power to conduct pinprick strikes to curb the attack.²⁶ Their sources evidently were limited to Bosnian Muslim locals who feared the loss of their homes and one dazed and confused UN military observer (UNMO).

Did these reports represent no nonsense prize winning material that validated the Emmy Amanpour won for Bosnia? Hardly. They were devoid of any semblance of truth and, if anything, appeared to compromise journalistic standards by failing to verify sources. As anyone who knows General Rose can attest, his reputation as an outstanding leader and soldier is well-deserved. He would not have permitted any of his troops - British, French, Malaysian, or other - to suffer any humanly preventable ignoble consequences. The media did not bother to query the Public Affairs Officer or request interviews with any of the participants who were manning the tactical operations center. Rather, they chose to rely on the reports of a single hysterical UNMO and a propagandized group of Muslim refugees. Had anyone sought the truth, they would have discovered that the events of that particular April 15th will remain vividly in the memories of many UNPROFOR personnel for years to come.

Two British JCOs were manning an Observation Post (OP) behind a Muslim position which could have been defended indefinitely. The Bosniacs, in fact, had already repelled several BSA attacks. They then realized that the British troops were behind them. In the course of the next BSA assault, the Muslim infantry unexpectedly and without reason scattered and retreated to alternate positions. Their only apparent motive to withdraw was to directly expose the JCOs to a confused BSA assault team. Serbian bullets killed one of the British soldiers and wounded the other; but responsibility lies with the Bosnian Muslims who had hoped to elicit a massive retaliatory response from NATO as punishment for the murder of noncombatant observers.

The easiest action for General Rose would have been to retaliate against the Serbs based on the preliminary data that

²⁶ Most of the damage that was done at Gorazde had actually occurred almost two years prior to these events by Muslims who had conducted their own ethnic cleansing against the Serbs. For a short description of the propaganda surrounding this battle, see John E. Sray, "U.S. Policy and the Bosnian Civil War: A Time for Reevaluation," *European Security*, Summer 1995, pp.318-327. An opposing point of view can be found in an article entitled "Yellow Rose," in *The New Republic*, Dec 5, 1994, p.24-25. Joshua Muravchik, of the American Enterprise Institute, reiterated the media's theme and authored a propaganda-laden article espousing the same arguments. He not only repeats the identical tirades of old Bosniac rhetoric but attempts to sway his American audience by making the outrageous claim that General Rose was anti-American. In Muravchik's words, General Rose had "a keen desire to show the Americans who is boss" in Bosnia, and he "(seemed) to be intensifying his private war with the Americans."

was received - the same sort of nonsense that these journalists used for their reports. As the explanation reveals, it would also have been an egregious mistake - something that the Bosniac army clearly hoped would occur. Instead of the General being the target of the media's venom for indecisiveness, he should have been lauded for his coolness under enormous emotional and political pressure.

In many respects, Peter Jennings' ABC special report, "The Peacekeepers: How the UN Failed in Bosnia," broadcast on April 24, 1995 surpassed the unprofessionalism of these previous accounts. At least in Amanpour's case, some viewers understand her biases and can filter information appropriately. Jennings' program, however, appeared staged and edited to bolster the anchorman's image as a hard-nosed, dogged reporter.

While inherent journalistic biases work to deliberately belittle UN accomplishments, ABC's inaccuracies began with its premise to show "how the most powerful nations in the world allowed themselves to be pushed around." This telecast came an entire year after the Amanpour reports, but it aired the same tired accusations by the same discredited witnesses. As Jennings whimpered that "town by town the Serbs went killing," amateur video showed General Rose in Gorazde making the statement that the Bosniac army turned and ran because "they wanted the UN to pick up the bits." His assessment reflected the truth, but ABC placed the footage in a spot where they ludicrously believed it could be debunked. The next segment immediately showed an interview with the frenzied UNMO and others who, from their hiding place in a former bank vault, determined that a BSA offensive had been unleashed on Gorazde.

Use of home videos and an interview with the head doctor of the Gorazde hospital also attempted to refute the UN's estimate of casualties during the battle. These scenes, which reflected only a few seconds of activity and very easily could have been staged, somehow were supposed to hold more credibility than extensive and impartial UN investigations of the situation. Reports from UN pilots that many medical evacuation flights from the Gorazde enclave included soldiers with minor scratches received flippant treatment. Lightly wounded combatants were not covered by an agreement negotiated between the BSA and the UN. Nonetheless, rather than worry about wounded civilians who were the intended evacuees, the Bosniac government opted to redeploy some of its forces under the cover of this operation.

Most notably, ABC offered camera time to Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic. Realizing his opportunity to play for sympathy to an American audience, he solemnly declared that the "UN wished to take Bosnia off the table -- by all means." ABC allowed this laughable assertion to pass without comment. Later in the program, when Jennings began a new diatribe about the UN failure to protect Bihac, they featured Silajdzic again demanding

that General Rose launch air strikes.²⁷ The sin of omission in this case was that no one noted the BSA conducted this operation as a counterattack to reduce previous successful gains by the Bosniac army in this sector.

One of the media's few consistencies on Bosnia happens to be its inconsistency. Military offensives, snipers, and humanitarian strife too often become news only when they apply to the Muslims. Thus, journalists are naturally drawn to such stimuli while overlooking Bosniac misdeeds as well as the UN's successful prevention of such ills by either side. The above examples represent only two of the many slanted reports which have been overly sympathetic to the Bosnian Muslim government and seem designed to prompt exaggerated reactions from viewers. Unequal treatment of either side or deliberate disregard of actual facts leads to implications of yellow journalism. As much as anyone, the media must realize that moral ambiguities abound in this civil war.

Prior to leaving this section, one additional topic begs clarification -- namely, the media's gullibility in printing selective "intelligence leaks." At least twice, "unidentified high-level officials" have treated journalists to reports of mass graves around Srebrenica and elsewhere which allege that such information proves the Serbs have been guilty of 90 percent of the atrocities in this war.²⁸ Such information routinely receives additional credence from the media in that it has been derived from satellite (imagery) sources and therefore must be unimpeachable.

First of all, even the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) disputes such figures, and their data frequently invites criticism for skewing the facts in favor of the Bosniac

²⁷ Jennings emphasized the oft-misreported fact that the UN deployed a Bangladeshi battalion to Bihac (to replace a departing French unit) without sufficient weapons. In reality, the Germans not only provided the Bangladeshis cold weather training but also to a great extent helped outfit them. General Rose correctly and politely pointed out that Bangladesh does not supply each individual soldier with a weapon due to cost. However, rumors also persist that some of these troops sold or gave away their weapons to their fellow Muslims in the Bosniac army. By the time of their report, ABC had to have been aware of this information.

²⁸ See, for example, the articles by Eric Schmitt in the *New York Times*, Aug 10, 1995, p.1 and Elizabeth Neuffer in the *Boston Globe*, Oct 3, 1995, p.1. The International Red Cross announced on Aug 11 that there was no evidence of the supposed mass graves in Srebrenica. Their report was largely ignored by the media.

government.²⁹ More importantly, however, these "leaks" play directly to the naivete of public perceptions surrounding the spy mystique. While our satellites possess some amazing capabilities, they cannot differentiate between living Serbs, Muslims, and Croats - especially since no ethnic differences exist. Common sense thus dictates that they cannot distinguish ethno-religious characteristics among corpses in mass graves which have become all too common in Bosnia and Croatia. Rational and responsible journalists should necessarily cast aspersions at such hyperbole rather than citing it as convincing evidence.

THE QUALITY OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY

Quality of diplomacy as an element of national power has been recognized and embodied in political and military theory from the ancient (Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*), to the medieval (Machiavelli's *The Prince*), to the contemporary period. The latter perhaps being most notably represented in Hans Morgenthau's seminal work *Politics Among Nations*. According to Mr. Morgenthau, diplomacy constitutes the most important element of national power:

Diplomacy, one might say, is the brains of national power, as national morale is its soul. If its vision is blurred, its judgment defective, and its determination feeble, all the advantages of...(other national power elements)...will in the long run avail a nation little. (Additionally)...it is of the utmost importance that the good quality of the diplomatic service be constant. And quality is best assured by dependence upon tradition and institutions.³⁰

Judging by the aforementioned standards, American statecraft has been woefully outclassed by a novice but shrewd Bosnian Muslim government which successfully sold its image as innocent victim to a naive and overly sympathetic embassy staff. In fact, U.S. diplomacy arguably reached its lowest ebb since Ambassador

²⁹ Prior to Serb refugees fleeing the Krajina, UNHCR statistics listed Bosnian refugee populations resulting from ethnic cleansing as comprising 36% Serb, 20% Croat, and 44% Muslim. At worst, these figures would show that the Serbs were responsible for approximately 64% of the problem, but there is no way to accurately account for Croat vs. Muslim violence which also bears some responsibility for these disturbing numbers. Any data which alleges to prove one side or the other committed such and such a percentage of the ethnic cleansing should immediately become suspect.

³⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1965 (3d edition), pp.139 and 141.

Patrick Hurley lost China³¹ and Ambassador April Glaspie benignly, if unwittingly, gave Saddam the green light to punish Kuwait for stealing oil. At the very least, this particular ambassador's appointment demonstrated the flaws in assigning a representative with ethnic and family ties to a country which may have interests incongruous to those of the United States.

American diplomatic dilemmas vis-a-vis Bosnia can actually be traced to a failure of foresight during the time the former Yugoslavia began to disintegrate. The headlong rush by the U.S. and Germany to recognize Croatian and Bosnian sovereignty prior to their meeting the traditional requirements has yet to be adequately explained. However, the activities of the small embassy team in Sarajevo exacerbated this lack of prudence and left much to be desired. First and foremost, it must shoulder the predominance of guilt for American lack of clear thinking on Bosnian issues.

The problems first became apparent during a congressional delegation visit to Sarajevo by Senators Dole, Warner, and Biden in early June 1994. Despite repeated requests to permit a UN briefing for the three senators by the U.S. members of UNPROFOR, the ambassador's staff claimed that time was insufficient and the schedule too inflexible. Of course, the hidden agenda ensured that only the embassy point of view would be heard. This matter, however, constituted the least of the difficulties connected with this distinctive visit.

On June 5, the embassy staff apparently had arranged for the three senators to attend Sunday mass at the Heart of Jesus Cathedral with the Bosnian Croat Catholics. For whatever reason, the delegation arrived late. As Croat parishioners and UNPROFOR personnel watched in astonishment, news crews with bright lights invaded this dimly lit medieval-style church in the middle of the bishop's homily. With all eyes upon them, our culturally unattuned embassy staff led the senators to the front rows where they remained approximately ten minutes for a photo opportunity. They then departed while the bishop continued his homily.

While the ambassador undoubtedly assured our senators that their visit provided a morale boost for the Croats, it had exactly the opposite effect for the majority of them. As discussed below, the Bosnian Croats generally dislike most outsiders; but until that time, Americans were well-received. However, the overt rudeness displayed by our insensitive embassy staff on that particular day ended any perceived affinity for the U.S. among that Croat crowd.

To make matters worse, rumors began to circulate among the Croat community that our official delegation had brought Muslims into the cathedral. Despite occasional Bosniac propaganda to the

³¹ see Barbara W. Tuchman, "If Mao Had Come To Washington: An Essay In Alternatives," *Foreign Affairs*, Oct 72, Vol. 1, pp. 44-64.

contrary, Catholic Croats do not want Muslims in their churches any more than the religious Muslims welcome Croat Catholic or Serbian Orthodox Christians into their mosques. The corollary to the axiom that "there are no atheists in fox holes" can be stated as people in war zones tend to take their religion seriously. The Croats certainly epitomize such an example.

This congressional junket represented a worst case scenario wherein an embassy attempted to alter perceptions by limiting and controlling the parameters of the visit. It was tantamount to the proverbial frog who could only describe the world from the confines of his well. He had no realization of the sun and moon until the structures of his home had burst and forced him to expand his horizons. In this manner, as Professor Morgenthau might have stated it, the embassy staff blurred our vision and corrupted our traditions and institutions.

Diplomatic subterfuge continued when the ornate new embassy was officially dedicated on July 4, 1994 and the U.S. became a much more visible player in Sarajevo. Ambassador Victor Jackovich opened the ceremonies that day with a speech so colored with sympathy and empathy for the Muslim cause that it even evoked snickering from representatives of the Bosniac government. UNPROFOR members, who thought they were performing an impartial peacekeeping mission, were left incredulous by its rhetoric.

Among other embellished statements, the ambassador declared that "fascism will pass" as he equated the symbolism of opening the embassy on the U.S. holiday to Bosniac pursuit of liberty and human rights.³² Propaganda aside, the Serbs have probably suffered more at the hands of fascists than any nationality other than the Jews. Moreover, Croats in Bugojno and Serbs in Turbe (to name just a few) who were previous victims of Muslim ethnic cleansing would have been delighted to provide fervent testimonials of Bosniac "pursuit" of these ideals.

Jackovich's belligerent remarks could only have been targeted against any Serbs who hoped that this ceremony would mark a new era of unbiased American retrospection. His clear intent was to signify that even if the U.S. government had not formally decided to take sides, this embassy would implement its own foreign policy. One must assume that these remarks had never been officially submitted to his superiors for approval.

The most illustrative incident concerning the embassy's attempt to distort the truth had yet to take place. During the late afternoon of 18 September 1994, a day which had remained eerily quiet by Sarajevo standards, a major attack erupted on the northeast end of the city. A supporting action could also clearly be heard to the southwest. Anyone who had been in Sarajevo more than a few days would have quickly realized that the Bosnian Muslim army was attempting to seize BSA artillery positions. (The only alternative could have been the Serbs

³² Author's personal notes and recollections of the ceremony

attacking themselves.) Due to the location of a prominent vantage point, it became possible to observe the operation as it unfolded.

As UN personnel returned to the compound to file the pertinent reports, NATO officers began calling to request appropriate bombing targets. They had been informed that "the Serbs were attacking the city." Dismayingly, other than UNPROFOR itself, the only culprit that possessed the requisite communication nodes to pass such erroneous information directly to NATO with such timeliness was the U.S. embassy. In this case, the UN managed to avert a grave miscarriage of justice; but in less climactic instances, one can only speculate on the quantity of falsified data which made its way back to Washington, D.C.

Only three logical explanations exist for this near debacle: the embassy staff was blatantly inept; embassy personnel were spending their time in Vienna (a frequent occurrence) and merely relayed to NATO the contents of a report which they had received from the Bosnian government and did not bother to verify;³³ or, they deliberately attempted to "cook" the report and disseminate disinformation. Whichever circumstance almost caused this potential catastrophe remains an open question. Regardless, all three signify inexcusable and unconscionable behavior.

By the winter of 1994, the State Department announced that Ambassador Jackovich and his staff would be replaced. Nevertheless, these personnel lingered as "lame ducks" for another few months, and their situation provided them at least one more opportunity to discredit the Serbs.

Prior to the embassy staff's departure, the BSA had begun to consistently close the Sarajevo airport with the (somewhat justified) argument that Muslim politicians were utilizing it as a base to travel abroad on Western aircraft originally earmarked to haul humanitarian aid. They could then spread their own brand of propaganda. Jackovich, realizing the Serbs would prove true to custom and react impulsively, seized the occasion to make an unprecedented announcement of his scheduled flight. Of course, the Serbs promptly closed the airport again. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was then forced to condemn this action in support of his beleaguered subordinate.

Notwithstanding the predictable foolishness of the Serbs, the ambassador had flown out of Sarajevo airport numerous times without anyone paying the slightest bit of attention. He could easily have slipped out once again by merely keeping his plans

³³ It must be emphasized here that the embassy in Sarajevo was not guarded by U.S. Marines who traditionally perform this mission and could have transmitted reliable reports. Rather, the embassy assigned this task to Bosnian Muslim gunmen who on more than one occasion denied entry to U.S. citizens. Whether the embassy staff actually condoned such behavior is unknown, but it led to questions of who was in charge.

to himself. Although he may have been forced to drive the uncomfortable route to Zagreb, he probably enjoyed every minute knowing that the BSA had stupidly fallen into another PR ambush.

Despite its shortcomings, the former embassy staff should not be perceived as exclusively guilty. Its parent organization obviously gave it plenty of help. Yet no one should misconstrue the intent of the above discussion as an unabashed frontal assault on the entire State Department and its position on Bosnia. Many fine people dedicate their professional lives to the Department of State and retain a firm grasp on reality in the Balkans. Nonetheless, they appear to have lost the internal debate as official policy strives to support the erroneous notion that the Muslims really are the innocent victims which they portray themselves to be in their own propaganda. The reasons behind this facade can only be guessed.

Some Bosnia watchers theorize that strategic thinkers in the State Department regard it necessary to kowtow to oil-producing Islamic states. These nations concurrently attempt to publicly portray the Bosnian struggle in terms of the Crusades while privately paying Western PR firms to urge their governments to send troops to aid the Bosniac cause.³⁴ Others believe that certain well-placed egotists call the shots and derive support from dramatic media events such as the very public resignations two years ago of a few analysts who disagreed with U.S. policies toward Bosnia. (The press omitted informing the public that some of these individuals had previously secured better employment opportunities with "think tanks" sympathetic to their respective opinions.) Regardless of the truth, the salient point of the issue is that American policy lacks consistency.

Subsequent to two weeks of intensive NATO airstrikes, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke conducted his shuttle diplomacy in support of the new U.S. peace plan. While doing so, he loudly trumpeted that the West had not taken sides and the bombing was not designed to tip the military balance in favor of the Bosniacs. Simultaneously, the new ambassador to Bosnia, John Menzies, joined his counterpart in Croatia, Peter Galbraith, in congratulating the Muslim 5th Corps for "liberating" the province of Bihac. Until the success of the lightning Croat ground offensive to capture the Krajina and the NATO air attacks, this unit had spent the entire war surrounded.

When the two ambassadors were queried whether they would attempt to persuade the Muslims to halt their offensive in support of Holbrooke's initiatives, Menzies inexplicably replied,

³⁴ One of the jokes that circulated during Desert Storm was the following: "What is the new Saudi battle hymn? Answer: Onward Christian Soldiers."

"We're not here to convey that kind of message."³⁵ The type of diplomatic coordination and purported pressure manifested by this example only intensifies the confusion surrounding the mixed signals of U.S. policy toward Bosnia.

BOSNIAN SERBS: THEIR OWN WORST ENEMY

Does any of the above imply that the U.S., NATO, or the UN should relent on the pressure being applied against the Bosnian Serbs? Absolutely not! The Serbs lost the propaganda war shortly after the inception of hostilities and perhaps this factor aggravated many of the atrocities they undoubtedly committed. However, the behavior and actions of some members of the BSA has been inexcusable. They need to leave their mythology behind and enter the modern world if they hope to live in peace among their neighbors.³⁶

Concurrently, American commentators should be careful about their popular penchant to condemn the Serbs as an ethnic group. Individuals have been responsible for war crimes - not the entire nation. The BSA may have more than its fair share of brutal, boorish, and morally repugnant characters who disgust Western sensibilities, but they are no worse than their counterparts in the Bosniac military and government. Their early victories in this war, in part, made them unbearable to some Westerners whose

³⁵ See the article entitled "NATO Extends Bosnia Bomb Halt" by Daniel Williams and John Pomfret in the *Washington Post*, Sept 21, 1995, p.1

³⁶ The Serbs have always perceived themselves as martyrs - especially in preventing the spread of Islam throughout Orthodox eastern Europe. (The Croats believe they help fill this self-appointed role for Catholic western Europe.) One of the major Serbian holidays revolves around the battle of Kosovo which they lost to the Turks on June 28, 1389. When it became clear to the Serbian knights that their cause was hopeless, one of their number feigned surrender to the Turkish army while hiding a dagger in his clothing. When he was dragged in front of the Turkish sultan, he pulled out the weapon and promptly cut the Turkish leader's throat. This action had no effect on the outcome of the battle since the sultan's heir immediately took command of the well-organized and disciplined Turkish forces; but the Turks' exhibited their wrath by refusing to permit the burial of their slain foes. Instead, the corpses were left lying on the field of battle where the blackbirds could peck at their bones. To this day, a Serbian mother traditionally greets her newborn son into the world with the words: "Welcome to the world you little avenger of Kosovo." For an excellent and more complete description of these events and their mythology, see Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 35-40. Lieutenant-General Ratko Mladic, commander of the BSA, often emphasizes the importance of Serbian history to his troops during his motivational talks.

traditional predilections reflexively support the underdog. Failure to appreciate the intricacies of this new age of informational warfare has extracted a heavy price from the Serbs for their initial combat successes.

America need not succumb to the false messages which the Bosniacs are selling. Our society must retain its perspective on all the warring factions and learn to recognize the tools of propaganda. When this conflict began, cosmopolitan Sarajevan Muslims realized the importance of both perception management and the need to disseminate their message to the world. This awareness, coupled with the expertise of their PR firms, resulted in a highly successful psychological operations campaign. Meanwhile, the more rustic Serbs proved no match for this competition. They relied on their Bolshevik slogans, recited them by rote, and were promptly dismissed by the international press. While the U.S. and its allies must continue to pursue war criminals, no one should condemn an entire nationality for its lack of erudition and finesse.

THE CROAT CONNECTION

Other than to occasionally avail themselves of the services offered by the PR firms, the Bosnian Croats play a less significant role in the propaganda game than their sometime Muslim allies or their sponsors in Croatia proper. Croat attitudes toward their neighbors and the UN, however, will be critical to the future of real world stability in the region and thus requires some perspective. First of all, none of the recent Bosniac military successes would have been possible without the phenomenal changes which occurred in the army of Croatia proper. Even with NATO providing the appropriate air support, the Bosniac army would have remained stymied without President Franjo Tudjman's offensive to capture the Krajina. Secondly, Croat relationships probably constitute the most complicated enigma of this war. Today's alliances may mean nothing tomorrow.

Bosnian Croat disdain for both their Muslim and Serb neighbors has been adequately demonstrated by the on-again/off-again combat operations they have conducted against each other during the past four years. Degrees of animosity vary by local interests as well as relative successes and failures in integrating cooperative efforts through the Croat - Muslim Federation. The Bosnian Croats and Muslims formed this organization in March 1994, primarily at the behest of the U.S. and Germany, to provide a united front against the Serbs. Strategically, it amounted to a stroke of political genius; tactically, it suffers from substantial mistrust on both sides.

Croat antipathy for the UN manifests itself in other ways. President Tudjman emphasizes that subsequent to his army's capture of the Krajina, the UN has outlived its usefulness. He declares that he will permit the UN headquarters to remain in Zagreb but demands that UN troops depart. Bosnian Croats share many of his feelings and believe that too many countries and

people exploit this war and grow rich because of it. For instance, except for the U.S. and Great Britain who decline to accept payment, the UN pays approximately one thousand dollars per month for each soldier performing a UN mission. The costs for other UN agencies can run even higher with the total estimated costs for Bosnia amounting to \$5 million per day. (The U.S. taxpayer funds almost thirty percent of this bill.)

Due in part to these realities, the Bosnian Croats refer to the UN as "Blue Pigs." Blue - to denigrate the color of UN military headgear; Pig - as a derogatory term toward the Muslims whom the Croats perceive as being favored (at least initially) by the UN. In some Bosnian Croat strongholds, such as Gornji Vakuf, UN vehicles must keep their windows up at all times. The reason for such circumstances being that younger children attempt to shoot needles through blowguns at the passengers. As white UN vehicles approach from a distance, teenagers launch into scornful mock laughter while adults simply look away in disgust.

How does the above relate to the propaganda offensive? The Bosnian Croats (even among themselves) and Croats proper do not always speak with a united voice; but the issue that transcends all others revolves around their compelling desire for Croatian unification. This situation does not bode well for the future of either the Federation or the Bosnian Government. While relations between Croats and Muslims have never been good, their deterioration seems to be accelerating. Subsequent to the Croat victory in the Krajina, the Muslims have complained that they are being treated as a "little brother."

As Bosniac propaganda attempts to underscore partnership with the Croats, it actually runs the risk of too much success. No one should underestimate Croatian and Serbian desires to unite their kinsmen and thus split Bosnia between themselves. If the Croats turn *en masse* against the Bosniacs, the Muslim government could be faced with a highly demoralized populace that had been propagandized to believe success was not possible without cooperation. Such events would effectively leave the Muslims without UN protection, destroy any remaining will to fight, and confine them to a small island of land around Sarajevo.³⁷

³⁷ Many Balkan observers and pseudo-military experts point to the Croatian operation in Krajina as proof of the deterioration in the Serb military. Such analysis misses the big picture. Morale and discipline problems had plagued the Krajina Serb army for quite some time. President Milosevic of rump Yugoslavia ostensibly sent General Mile Mrksic, one of the top generals in the Yugoslav army, to rectify this state of affairs. He has been accused of war crimes from former operations, but he possesses a long list of impressive military credentials. Mrksic had adequate time to whip these forces into shape; but instead, to the dismay of many of these troops, he apparently gave the order to retreat without offering any significant resistance. Rather than this operation being indicative of the status of the Serb military, it adds further evidence of a deal between Tudjman

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND WARNINGS

As noted in the beginning of this article, Muslim apologists will condemn the above arguments as lacking sympathy for their favorite victims. Alvin and Heidi Toffler answered these types of critics best in a passage from their book *War and Anti-War*:

Some readers may confuse the absence of moralizing (about the hatefulness of war) for an absence of empathy with the victims of war. This is to assume that cries of pain and anger are enough to prevent violence. Surely there are enough cries of pain and enough anger in the world. If they were sufficient to produce peace, our problems would be over.³⁸

With these sentiments in mind, political leaders must focus on the reality of Bosnia and not the contrived issues of influence peddlers. All the groups in this country have been victims, and they all deserve our sympathy and best humanitarian efforts.

Military support for any warring faction, however, remains another matter. Such benefits should be withheld until all sides abandon their greed for more land, tire of killing each other, and permit the implementation of a just and lasting peace. Only then will it become time to separate the war criminals and treat the others with compassion. The UN arguably had been close to achieving these terms prior to the U.S. giving the green light for the Croatian Krajina offensive and the NATO bombing. Now, defeat has been seized from the jaws of victory.

Those who believe the recent Dayton negotiations and latest agreements will result in a durable peace fail to see through the veil of Bosnian Muslim schemes and propaganda. They, likewise, do not appreciate the vindictiveness and revenge factor in Balkan history. The forthcoming winter will do more to slow combat operations than any potential ceasefire accord, and fighting will resume in the spring. When it does, the world will have to await a new saturation point as to when the warring factions again exhaust themselves on the killing fields. In the meantime, the U.S. and its allies have renewed the debate over whether deploying NATO peacekeeping forces should also train and equip the Bosniac army.

Any lull in fighting only provides the Bosniacs another smoke screen from which to provoke the Serbs. They have successfully hoodwinked NATO into engaging its air forces for their support and the next step will involve an attempt to morally coerce its ground troops to recapture territory which they desire. (e.g. the Bosniac demand that Banja Luka be demilitarized while they refused to do the same in Sarajevo.)

and Milosevic to divide Bosnia between themselves.

³⁸ Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*, Little, Brown and Company, New York, 1993, p.5.

Certainly, any decisions pertaining to the mission of deploying American ground troops must be made by elected U.S. government officials -- not relegated to the Bosniacs and their PR firms or influenced by the false reports of the State Department and media.

American proclivities mistakenly insist on simplifying this conflict to one of good versus evil. Debates over training and arming the Bosniacs with deployed forces bespeak of the total misunderstanding with which the U.S. interprets this situation. Such arguments demonstrate that elements of our government continue to insist on taking sides. While Bosniac apologists applaud this potential mission, our European allies recoil in horror.

The Bosnian Muslim government certainly does not reflect the image of a liberal western-style democracy as the press misleadingly portrays it. This group remains Islamist-dominated and desperately attempts to hide its true sentiments. It is more likely to be influenced by Iran and the Mujahedin than by anyone in the West. These radical groups may remain underground or depart during NATO's deployment, but they will return later to ensure that the Bosniac population becomes properly politicized and obedient to fundamentalist doctrine. Does the U.S. really intend to add high-quality American training and weapons to this radicalism?

Our NATO allies, without bluntly stating the obvious, more realistically fear the establishment of a future base from which the Iranians can spread their fanatic ideology and orchestrate acts of terrorism. Worse, if the Russians and black market weapons dealers do not cease cooperation with Iran, Bosnia could become a strategic point for the introduction of nuclear-tipped SCUD missile systems aimed at the infidels in central Europe. In short, it could either become Europe's Cuba or Palestine.

The Muslims previously underscored to Mr. Holbrooke that they would not attend a peace conference or accept a ceasefire without an American commitment to level the battlefield. Pushed on by such ill-defined logic as that expressed by Anthony Lewis, "American instinct and values point toward the preservation of a multicultural Bosnia"³⁹ (as though it ever existed), the U.S. fell for the bait. Attempts by the Bosniacs and their sympathizers to goad America and the West into fighting this civil war unfortunately began to bear fruit with the NATO bombings. In some measure, they must credit this achievement to the immensely effective PR campaign to portray the Muslims as victims of evil aggression. They would reach their pinnacle of success, though, by maneuvering NATO forces into fighting for them on the ground. America can expect the Bosniac government to exploit troop deployments toward this end.

Ultimate success in ending the Bosnian civil war must be

³⁹ Anthony Lewis, *New York Times*, Oct 9, 1995, p.17.

based on a realistic division of land. Final agreements must assign to the Bosniacs only the territory which they can militarily defend on their own -- not what they feel they deserve. NATO political leaders must force the Muslims to accept and abide by a fair settlement or make it absolutely clear that the West will abandon the Bosniac cause. NATO troops can redeploy to cordon off the area, isolate it, and contain the fighting while the warring factions finish the conflict among themselves. These words may sound harsh to the unindoctrinated, but they simply mirror the fact that this war thrives on brutality and cruelty and no other recourse would remain available.⁴⁰

As the U.S. decisively intervenes by deploying troops, our strategists must understand the consequences. Assuming Bosniac propagandists replicate their past successes, American (and other NATO) forces will find themselves victims of "mission creep." This situation will sooner or later result in military objectives to acquire more territory for the Muslims. Land which they never possessed and, for the majority of Bosniac citizens, land which they are not now willing to fight and die for themselves - despite the claims of Muslim political leaders who assiduously avoid the trenches.

Such a mission will certainly grow costly. Neither the Bosniac army nor the BSA possess the required proficiency to confront a well-trained modern force,⁴¹ but they can inflict

⁴⁰ Insufficient consideration has been given to the isolation option. NATO plans to deploy 60,000 troops to this peacekeeping operation. An additional 30,000, primarily from NATO countries, already serve as UN forces in Bosnia. Rather than interposition all of these soldiers as targets between the warring factions, a NATO quarantine could be established. The suffering caused by this civil war would likely end sooner in such a situation.

⁴¹ The lack of Bosniac military skill has already been discussed. The BSA, despite General Mladic's frequent boasting and the legends surrounding its prowess for guerrilla warfare, likewise remains ill-prepared to face anything more than the Bosniacs. Even the Serbs' closest ally, the Russians, admit these deficiencies. An incident rumored to have occurred in the summer of 1994 illustrates this point. General Pavel Grachev, the Russian Minister of Defense, was meeting General Mladic to encourage him to accept the 5-Nation (U.S., Britain, Germany, France, and Russia) Contact Group Plan to end the fighting and divide the land. Mladic was disinclined and noted in typical bluster: "I have captured Ribnica; I have captured Vozuca, etc." Grachev looked at Mladic and replied, "General, I have not heard of any of those places. However, I do know that if you were forced to face a modern army, you would not last twenty minutes." The author wishes to thank David Harland and Tony Banbury for sharing this anecdote during a conversation in Sarajevo. These individuals were two of a handful of outstanding UN civilian

numerous casualties due to the terrain and their knowledge of it. Combat operations would occur in areas where either mountainous topography or urban areas predominate. These types of terrain represent the two most casualty-intensive conditions in which ground troops must fight. Even ill-disciplined and untrained street gangs who expertly know their turf can wreak high casualties in these circumstances.

The rationale that a U.S. troop deployment will only entail peacekeeping activities must be discarded. Impartiality, an absolute requirement for these types of operations, ended when the NATO bombs fell. This next stage of involvement will not equate to the "clean" unseen war of dropping bombs from 30,000 feet against a crippled air defense system or firing Tomahawks from a safe off-shore distance. Some may choose to semantically escape the problem by calling this a peacemaking operation; but for the soldier or marine on the ground, this term just euphemistically means war with one hand tied behind your back.

U.S. troops will become targets as soon as they hit the ground. Our forces must remain cognizant of this fact and recognize the dangers inherent in a mission designed to separate warring factions. In other words, U.S. units must possess overwhelming fire power, flexibility to conduct combat operations when required, virtually unrestricted rules of engagement, and a viable mission statement. All sides should be treated equally, objectively, and, most importantly, as enemy forces. This operation will require not only striking the Serbs when events warrant but the Muslims (and possibly Croats) as well if they violate agreements.

When the Bosniacs begin to play their cynical games - and they certainly will - the U.S. response must be swift, appropriate, and unimpeded by restrictive standing orders designed by Muslim sympathists. As soon as they employ their hidden mortars in Sarajevo to induce counterbattery fires from the Serbs, these weapons and their crews should be eliminated. At the time that a Bosniac squad fires at an observation post with the hope of blaming the Serbs, it should be destroyed and its higher chain of command punished. If the Muslims continue to murder their own people for the television cameras, appropriate officials should be arrested and charged with war crimes. This situation will require combat vigilance by military units on the ground, and a willingness to stay the course of decisions on the part of elected officials back home. Any public expectations or self-perceptions of goodwill will likely dissipate quickly when confronted with the hard realities.

During the debate on lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia, several U.S. lawmakers opined that this war involves standing up for morality. They may be correct. However, the suspicious inner circle running the Bosnian Muslim government

employees who demonstrated the courage and tenacity to work directly in Bosnia where they could make a difference.

should fall far short of meeting anyone's criteria for the moral highground. All of the warring factions stand equally guilty of heinous crimes. Their villainy reflects a matter of scale and dimension - not severity. The Serbs controlled more land and people and thus expelled more of their former neighbors, but their ethnic cleansing has been exaggerated while Muslim atrocities were overlooked.

A simple analogy applies: We have three groups of murderer-rapists. Our first faction has killed nine and raped three; another has murdered five and raped two; the last has killed three and raped one. The three reprobates begin fighting among themselves. Are we therefore obligated to come to the aid of one of the two lesser miscreants because to date they have been less reprehensible? What kind of depraved moral code is the U.S. attempting to defend?

It remains in vogue among political scientists and policy makers to state that certain intractable problems defy a solution. Bosnia, they readily admit, falls into this category. Yet they cannot resist tampering around the fringes of the dilemma while attempting to find the elusive magic bullet which would help them to manipulate events and impose order. Any new agreement which involves arming and training the Bosniacs as well as providing them air support will convince their leadership that the war must continue. Their greed for land will only prolong the search for peace and the agony of the people.

America, in particular, must acknowledge the obvious. Forcing the UN to acquiesce and permit NATO bombing of Serb targets amounted to an act of war by anybody's definition. Irreparable mistakes, poor judgements, and Mencken's "cocksure moralists" have brought the U.S. to this unenviable point with little latitude for the future. American officials should not now squander the small amount of flexibility remaining to them. If they permit the Bosniacs and their apologists to control and formulate the debate, the American public will lose objectivity. These groups will continue to insist on defining the situation in propaganda terms based on their own sense of emotionalism. As U.S. (and indeed NATO) political leaders ponder future courses of action, they should at least phrase the moral questions precisely and appropriately: "What vital geostrategic national interests does this war jeopardize?" and "How much blood of our nineteen-year olds is this place worth?"